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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

140,000,000 eggs

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, April 15, 1937.

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MR. SALISBURY: Here we are with the Household Calendar coming up again as Feature No. 1 on our schedule today. And according to custom Ruth Van Deman is here at the other microphone ready to take over. Ruth, what's on your docket today?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Eggs, Morse. One hundred and forty million eggs.

MR. SALISBURY: That's quite a bunch of eggs - between eleven and twelve million dozen. Where did you get them all?

MISS VAN DEMAN: They're statistical eggs.

MR. SALISBURY: Statistical eggs? They're no eggs at all.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Oh, yes they are. A hundred and forty million is the number of eggs the hens of the United States are due to lay today according to the law of averages. I've been down talking to Dr. S. A. Jones of the Division of Crop and Livestock Estimates.

MR. SALISBURY: That's how it is. Yes, I know Doctor Jones has the figures on egg production.

MISS VAN DEMAN: He showed me records of egg production by States, and by regions, and for the country as a whole; and by months, and by years, and for the five-year average - almost every way a reasonable person could possibly want them.

MR. SALISBURY: And then on top of all that you had the nerve to ask him for them on a daily basis.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, worse than that. I specified the 15th day of April.

MR. SALISBURY: I'm surprised you didn't ask him to estimate it for the 7 minutes of this broadcast.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I did. But I didn't get very far on that. It seems that nobody has plotted the curve of production hour by hour from the time the hens begin their work in the morning, until they knock off for their afternoon naps. It's the general opinion though that they do most of their laying before 2 o'clock.

(over)

But getting back to the April 15 figure, Doctor Jones was nothing if not obliging. He got out his slide rule and his graphs showing how the curve of egg production tends to hit its high each year somewhere between the first and the 15th of April and in a few minutes he was giving me totals running into the millions and billions.

Last year the hens of America, it seems, produced about 30-1/2 billion eggs from January 1 to December 31, and about 4-1/4 billion of them during the month of April. About half of the whole year's crop comes during March, April, May, and June. Going on that basis, today's production should be around 140 million.

MR. SALISBURY: Then as far as mass production goes, this is the time to talk about eggs.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Absolutely. It's the time of greatest quantity, highest quality, and lowest prices. Those three have a very definite relation in the egg cycle. As the curve of egg production shoots up the price curve drops, but the quality line goes along with production.

MR. SALISBURY: Of course the commercial people take advantage of that in putting eggs into storage.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I'm glad you spoke of storage, Morse. It reminds me of a letter I had last fall from an Iowa homemaker who suggested that I say something about packing eggs at home in the season of abundance for use in the months when the hens are on vacation. She said she bought eggs each summer in August whenever a cool spell came along and put them down in a limewater solution until November and December.

MR. SALISBURY: In August? The quality isn't likely to be so good then as in April.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's exactly what I wrote her. The early spring eggs as they come to market generally have a firmer albumen and a stronger membrane around the yolk, and are freer of the defects that show up when the egg is put in front of a candling machine.

MR. SALISBURY: Being a little Scotch, I like to get the most for my money. So if I were going to store eggs at home I'd certainly do it in the spring, when the price is down. And I'd get the highest quality possible. That's one place the homemaker may well take her cue from the cold-storage man.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes. The highest quality, clean, fresh, infertile eggs, candled by an expert who knows how to cull out all the defective ones, are the kind of eggs it's worth while to put down in water glass or whatever the preserving solution is. There are good eggs laid in August. I don't mean to infer there are not. But the hens as well as us humans are feeling the effects of the hot weather and of their heavy work during the spring. So the quality of their product just isn't so uniformly high as in the spring.

MR. SALISBURY: Ruth, do you remember that sometime back you talked about graded, dated eggs one day on the Farm and Home Hour?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Very well. I've been on the lookout for the "certificate of quality" on every carton of eggs I've bought since. I was asking Mr. Rob Slocum, of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, just the other day how they were coming on with the grading of eggs according to the U. S. standards of quality.

MR. SALISBURY: It's increasing, isn't it?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, steadily. Last year, that is for the calendar year 1935, there were about 97-1/2 million eggs graded according to the Government specifications. Then some States have their own egg grading systems that correspond fairly closely with the Federal. New York State, for instance, has a law requiring that all eggs sold there be graded and labeled according to those grades. Other States have fresh eggs laws designed to protect the consumer.

MR. SALISBURY: I wish you'd tell me exactly what is a fresh egg.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I wish I could. But that seems to be a very difficult thing to define. It has to do with quality not with the time the egg was laid. There are sometimes eggs less than a day old that wouldn't meet the requirements of a fresh egg, according to the experts. That's why these Federal or State graded eggs are a protection to the consumer. They've been candled by an expert and sorted according to quality as far as it can be told without breaking the shell. The date on the cartons of graded eggs means the date when they were graded and sealed in that package. It does not mean the day the eggs were laid by the hen.

MR. SALISBURY: Ruth, changing the subject from the freshness of the eggs themselves, to the way they're prepared, I want to read you something I clipped from a magazine. I've been waiting until you brought up the subject of eggs so I could spring it on you.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Fine. Go ahead.

MR. SALISBURY: This was by a woman who signed herself housewife. She writes thus: "I read the recipe columns in the daily papers and women's magazines quite regularly, but I do think they can concoct the oddest conglomerations when giving recipes for egg dishes. Eggs are so good plain and, when fresh, have such a delicious flavor that it never seems necessary to me to add a lot of other ingredients which disguise their true flavor. I've wished often that some time the home economics writers would tell the very best and newest methods of fixing eggs plain, such as scrambling, frying and baking them. I imagine many cooks could learn considerable about egg preparation from these simple dishes." Now, how does that strike you?

MISS VAN DEMAN: It strikes me as very good sense indeed. I'm sure that Lucy Alexander and Mrs. Yeatman who wrote our leaflet on "Eggs at any meal" would agree entirely. It's precisely what they tried to do - give the scientific principles behind the cooking of eggs by themselves and in such simple combinations as omelets, souffles, custards, and fruit whips.

Of course I do think there's something to be said for varying the flavor of eggs now and then by serving them with a well-flavored sauce or adding some grated cheese, or a dash of curry.

Personally I find hard-cooked eggs stirred into a white sauce and spread on toast, so bland in flavor, so totally devoid of zip and interest, that only the fact that I know they're good for me enables me to eat my portion. Even a little chopped green pepper or curry powder in that white sauce would give the dish a lot more character and appetite appeal. And I think the tomato sauce on a Spanish omelet makes it a dish fit for anybody's dinner. There's something very pleasing to me about the combination of tomato and egg. I like it in a salad or in scrambled eggs served with fried tomatoes.

MR. SALISBURY: Well spoken. And may I add my word for ham and eggs country style. That combination may be a little heavy on the protein side, and not so light in calories, but it's good eating.

MISS VAN DEMAN: A perfectly good dietetics if you plan the rest of the meal accordingly.

MR. SALISBURY: Ruth, as you've been talking I've been figuring, and my estimate is that about 2 million eggs have been laid in these United States since we began.

MISS VAN DEMAN: All right I'll tell Doctor Jones. He may take you on his staff.

MR. SALISBURY: I doubt that. I used just an old-fashioned pencil, not a slide rule. Anyway before I join the ranks of the egg statisticians let me repeat the title of that egg leaflet in case anybody wants "the best and newest ways of fixing eggs plain." It is "Eggs at any meal." And Miss Van Deman's left the microphone but I know she doesn't mind my saying that she'll be glad to send a copy of "Eggs at any meal" to anyone who addresses her at the Bureau of Home Economics in Washington.

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